

Meeting Date: March 9, 2007

Agenda Item No. 17

Agenda Item: Four Land Acquisitions

Approved by: TTT

Prepared by: Katherine Cousins, Steve Elam, and Gregg Servheen

Background:

Lower St. Joe - The Lower St. Joe River property is 62 acres along one mile of river front located eight miles east of St. Maries. This parcel is being purchased under the Albeni Falls wildlife mitigation program for an estimated \$620,000. The primary wildlife values associated with the parcel are floodplain and riparian habitat. The acquisition will also provide an excellent opportunity to restore about half mile of meanders to Miesen Creek which currently flows through the property as a straight ditch. This acquisition will provide recreational fishing access, especially important in the lower St Joe River where the first 25 river miles are privately owned and only one developed public access point exists. Waterfowl hunting may also be possible. Avista utilities currently owns an adjoining upstream parcel of similar size and it is anticipated that Avista will work with the Department to manage these parcels similarly to fulfill their wetland mitigation obligations as desired through FERC.

Pend Oreille WMA lot – The 0.5-acre lot is located adjacent to the Lower Pack River Habitat Segment, part of the Pend Oreille Combined Lands Wildlife Management Area, and is being purchased for \$40,000 under the Albeni Falls wildlife mitigation program. This property will be acquired and managed for the purposes of preserving, protecting and restoring habitat for fish and wildlife and will contribute to the long-term plan of providing a safe movement corridor for wildlife moving along the Pack River as well as improved management of the WMA..

Pend Oreille WMA Ginter – The subject property is located in Bonner County on the north and east bank of the Pack River and is being purchased through the Albeni Falls wildlife mitigation program and Avista mitigation program for a total of \$2,169,129. The acquisition is composed of two separate parcels: the northern 210 acre parcel is being purchased for \$1,920,000 of Albeni Falls program monies while the southern 27.5 acre parcel is being purchased for \$249,129. Acquisition of these parcels will protect riparian and forested habitats as well as increased recreation opportunity and improve overall management of the WMA by adding to the continuity of lands along the Pack River along five+ miles of the Pack River.

Georgetown McCammon – This property consists of 83.66 acres 2 miles northwest of Georgetown Idaho and borders the Bear River for approximately ½ mile. The property will be purchased through cost share with the PacifiCorp mitigation settlement contributing \$20,000 and the department using \$58,000 in license monies. The property borders the existing Georgetown WMA and properties owned by the Department and BLM. This property is part of an important travel corridor for wildlife, particularly elk, traversing from the Bear River Range (Management Unit 75) and the Aspen Range (Management Unit 76). The area is also year round habitat for big game (deer, elk, and moose) and upland game (Columbian sharp-tailed, forest grouse, and Hungarian partridge) while the river and riparian corridor are important habitat for fisheries (Bonneville cutthroat, brown trout, and rainbow trout) and waterfowl. The property has historically been used as a dry cropland.

Policy issues:

Land acquisition in accordance with Commission land acquisition policy.

Public Involvement Process:

The public and county commissioners are supportive of these projects. The public will be informed and contacted for their input regarding management of the properties in concert with development of their respective management plans.

Justification:

Acquisition of the Lower St Joe, Pend Oreille WMA lot, Pend Oreille WMA Ginter and properties will provide partial habitat mitigation for the construction and operation of Albeni Falls Dam and abides by IDFG goals outlined in the Albeni Falls Wildlife Protection, Mitigation, and Enhancement Plan and Avista mitigation program.

Acquisition of the Georgetown McCammon property will provide for both riparian and upland wildlife and fisheries habitat as well as increase public recreation opportunities on the Georgetown WMA. And it fulfills some of the FERC mitigation obligations of PacifiCorp.

Action Requested:

Approval of Commission to proceed with the fee-title acquisition.

Staff Recommendations:

The Lands Committee recommends proceeding with the acquisition.